ARGYRESTHIA TRIFASCIATA STAUDINGER, 1871 (LEP.: YPONOMEUTIDAE) IN BRITAIN

By A. M. EMMET*

Mr. R. A. Softly took an example of this species in a Heath actinic light-trap on or about the 3rd of June, 1982 at Hampstead. The trap is situated on the top balcony of a block of flats, facing south and overlooking the British Rail station of Hampstead Heath (map reference TQ 274856). It is some 40 feet above ground level and 20 or 30 feet away from the crowns of sycamores and a poplar. Although canopy-feeders come to this elevated trap (*Microthrix similella* (Zincken), seldom encountered anywhere, turned up once on the 7th of July, 1980), in certain weather conditions small low-flying species also occur in numbers; for example, as many as 30 *Lyonetia clerkella* (Linnaeus) have appeared on a single night. It follows that the unusual siting of the trap is not necessarily of significance for this capture.

Fig. 1 *Argyresthia trifasciata*, Hampstead vi.1982. Enlarged approx. x 8.

The trap is run regularly by Mr. Softly for recording purposes. When a species of Microlepidoptera turns up which belongs to a family with which he is not familiar but is distinctively enough marked to be readily identifiable, he retains it for reference to a fellow entomologist. *Argyresthia trifasciata* fell into this category; it is described by Frey (1880: 385) as a charming little creature which is extraordinarily easy to recognise. Mr. Softly showed it to me and when I expressed the opinion that it was an *Argyresthia* new to Britain, he left it with me for further research. I described it over the telephone to the Rev. D. J. L. Agassiz, who is specialising in the Yponomeutidae, and he at once suggested that it was *A. trifasciata*. I then sent the moth to the British Museum (Natural History), where Dr. J. D. Bradley confirmed the determination.

The species was discovered by Anderegg in the Swiss canton of Valais and described by Staudinger (1871:425). It has since been found also in the French Alps and in Ardèche, a department in the extreme south-east of the Massif Central (Lhomme, 1939-46).

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According to Lhomme, the foodplants are *Juniperus sabina, J. phoenicea* and *J. thurifera*. All three occur in Britain as naturalised introductions, having been first imported in 1548, 1683 and 1752 respectively. However, only *J. sabina* thrives; it is to be found in many gardens and is commonly stocked by nurserymen (Dallimore & Jackson, 1923: 259). Fresh supplies are probably obtained periodically from the Continent and *A. trifasciata* may have been accidentally imported on its foodplant. This explanation has already been offered for the presence of *Gelechia sabinella* Zeller (Gelechiidae) which feeds on the same foodplant (Agassiz, 1978). There is a nursery stocking juniper species only a quarter of a mile from the site of the trap, which may have been the source of this specimen; its supplies are obtained from a grower in Hertfordshire but it is not yet known whence the latter firm acquires its stock.

Lhomme does not say how the larva feeds. We have five species of *Argyresthia* in Britain which have our native juniper *(J. communis)* as their host plant; two feed in shoots, two mine needles and one feeds in late summer in green berries. One of these methods of feeding is likely for *A. trifasciata*. The adults fly in France from late April until June, possibly rather too early for the larva to have mined young shoots. The species is not listed as a leaf-miner by Hering (1957), but this may be due to absence of information and is not conclusive. This leaves the fruits as marginally the most likely pabulum.

Description of the imago

Wingspan *c.* 9mm. Head with vertex rough-haired, white. Antenna whitish, annulated black, the annulations obsolescent beneath; labial palpus pale golden. Thorax and tegulae glossy golden. Forewing glossy golden; white fasciae at one-fifth and two-fifths, both direct, and one at three-fifths, inwards-oblique; irregularly-shaped subapical and tornal white spots tending to coalesce to form a fourth, inwards-oblique fascia; subcircular white spots on costa at one-half and at apex; cilia concolorous with wing. Hindwing pale grey.

The species should follow *Argyresthia ivella* (Haworth) and be given the log book number 409a (Bradley & Fletcher, 1979).

Mr. Softly, at whose request I am writing this paper, has presented the specimen to the British Museum (Natural History). He is to be congratulated on making this interesting and attractive addition to the British list. My thanks are due to the Rev. D. J. L. Agassiz and Dr. J. D. Bradley for making and confirming the determination respectively. I also thank Dr. Bradley for the photograph, and Mr. E. S. Bradford for preparing it for publication.

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AGONOPTERIX ASTRANTIAE HEINEMANN IN HAMPSHIRE. – On 9th June 1982 I found six larvae of this species on *Sanicula europaea* in a beech wood near East Meon. The moths emerged from 25th - 27th June, and this is the first record of *astrantiae* in Hampshire. During the last instar many of the larvae bite partially through the upper part of the leaf stalk causing the leaf to wither, and then continue to feed in the wilting folded leaf. This may explain why so few larvae had previously been found, because the leaf then droops below the level of the healthy leaves of the foodplant necessitating careful parting of the leaves in order to find the larvae. This habit was observed independently this year by H. N. Michaelis. – Dr. J. R. LANGMAID, 38 Cumberland Court, Festing Road, Southsea, Hants PO4 ONH.

LOW NUMBERS OF LEPIDOPTERA IN 1981. – My impression in Cumbria is that 1981 was about the poorest year for Lepidoptera on record. Admittedly owing to advancing years I did far less hunting around than I used to do; but it is certainly indisputable that when I was out and about I could find very few specimens of even the commoner species. For instance, on a visit to an area of limestone grassland near the Fairy Steps, Beetham, where there is usually an abundance of Lepidoptera, in warm sunshine on July 12th the scarcity was most depressing. I expected to find *Aricia artaxerxes salmacis* Stephens still out in good numbers, but saw just one. Usually in this area of what used to be South Westmorland, this butterfly is out from about June 15th to July 20th. Other butterflies were very scarce, but two moths helped to save the situation, *Zygaena filipendulae* L. and *Phothedes captiuncula* Treits., both of which were in good numbers. I even got a photograph of *P. captiuncula* sitting on a leaf – I had almost despaired of ever managing to photograph this moth, for when it is not wildly flying it usually dives deep down in the grass and is disturbed at the slightest touch of the vegetation – a most elusive insect.

The same story of paucity is true of my Mercury Vapour Trap, which I have admittedly operated only spasmodically. But on nights which I selected for operation the results were very sparse, and there were no surprises except negative ones! For instance, I never saw one *Amathes xanthographa* D. & S. Perhaps the nearest to a positive surprise was a *Dasypolia templi* L. on October 1st. Does my experience tally with that of most other Lepidopterists? – Rev. J. H. VINE HALL, "Rivendell", 3, The Green, Melmerby, Penrith, Cumbria CA10 1HG.